

The Romanian lied. The first National Festival of the Romanian lied in Braşov

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Abstract: *The history of song, of romance, or more precisely of the Romanian lied, is very long, closely connected to the faith of the Romanian people. Romanians, who underwent poverty, wars, riots and social upheavels, felt the need to confort this pain. They have always born their cross with resolution in times of need, but they have also lived their joy by singing holy songs during church services, through the songs known by those hiding in the mountains and forests –drafting songs, through the shepards who sang ballads and melancholic songs to their sheep, or mothers who sang lullabies to put their children to sleep, then through violin players and other traditional musicians performing for round dances and folk dances.*

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Romanian composers part I

The history of song, of romance, or more precisely of the Romanian lied, is very long, closely connected to the faith of the Romanian people. Romanians, who underwent poverty, wars, riots and social upheavels, felt the need to confort this pain. They have always born their cross with resolution in times of need, but they have also lived their joy by singing holy songs during church services, through the songs known by those hiding in the mountains and forests –drafting songs, through the shepards who sang ballads and melancholic songs to their sheep, or mothers who sang lullabies to put their children to sleep, then through violin players and other traditional musicians performing for round dances and folk dances. Thus, when faced with hardship, Romanians have always held their songs close to their hearts.

The first important collector of Romanian folk music was **Anton Pann** (1794-1854) – devoted to printing, preserving, and exploiting these old songs. Works like *Hospital of love* or *The singer of love* include a total of 176 songs from various categories, in psalmic notation: a) folk songs, called “village songs”; b) gleeful “table” songs probably from traditional musicians; c) romance songs of cult authors that they called “company songs”; d) songs of oriental inspiration;

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e) songs extracted from Romanian theater music, called “theater songs”, from **Flechtenmacher**’s comic operas and vaudevilles.” (Vancea, 1968, 81).

Also, in the first part of the 19th century “the romance represented, alongside the vodeville, the favourite genre of many music lovers. Among the composers who, in addition to marches, dances and other drawing room compositions, cultivated actively the romance, it is worth mentioning the names of **Theodor Georgescu** (1824-1880), **Alexis Gebauer** (1815-1889), and **Ioan Francisc Ferlendis** (1825-1906).” (Vancea, 71). One of the first supporters of Romanian vocal music and of vocal music with piano accompaniment was **Dimitrie G. Florescu** (1827-1875), who also used the lyrics of contemporary Romanian poets. “His masterpiece remains the romance *Steluța* [Little Star] (1853), based on a poem by Vasile Alecsandri. He also composed: *Așteptare* [Waiting], lyrics by V. Alecsandri, *Te iubesc* [I love you], lyrics by Gr. Alexandrescu, *Porumbița* [Little dove] and *Prizonieru* [The prisoner], lyrics by D. Bolintineanu and *Gondola vremii* [Time gondola], lyrics by G. Crețeanu.” (Cosma, 1976, 368) (my translation)

Eduard Caudella (1841-1924) wrote the romance *Fata răzeșului* [The Yoeman’s Daughter] (1881-1882), on lyrics by Gh. Irimescu; but also songs based on lyrics by poet Ana Kanta Kernbach (*S-a stins* [It is gone], *Cântec de leagăn* [Lullaby], etc.) and by Mihai Codreanu, six songs on lyrics by Iacob Negruzzi and other poets (Badea, Pletea, Gheorghe of Moldovia).

George Stephănescu (1843-1925), in addition to composition studies in Paris, he also studied canto with Delle Sedie, because he had a lovely voice. *Cântecul fluierașului* [The whistler song] in the musical extravaganza “Sânziana and Pepelea”, with a libretto signed by Vasile Alecsandri, is one of the most beautiful and popular pages in his creation: “George Stephănescu is at the same time one of the most personal and sensitive Romanian composers of lieder, although his compositions in this genre were firstly pedagogic, in order to provide his students from the canto class of the Conservatory with Romanian vocal music. His musical interpretation of lyrics by Eminescu, Alecsandri, Traian Demetrescu and many others ensure Stephănescu a leading role in our older lied literature.” (Vancea, 112) (my translation).

Gheorghe Skeletti (1835-1886) taught at the Conservatory in Iași and is the author of romances such as “*Ce te legeni codrule* [Why are you swinging, forest], *Tu din cer venit* [You, who came from the sky], *Spune, spune* [Tell me, tell me] etc., which were very popular at the time.” (Vancea, 129) (my translation)

George Dima (1847-1926) was born in Brașov. “In the period 1878-1880, the composer’s ‘Romanian individuality’, ‘Romanian specificity’ are manifest in the lieder composed not on the texts of Romanian poets – which would facilitate obtaining the Romanian sound based on the rhythm of the Romanian language – but on texts by German poets such as Scheffel, Lenau, Wied, etc.” (Vancea, 137) (my translation). Among the arrangements of folk songs for voice and piano, the following are worth mentioning: “*Vai mândruțo, dragi ne-avem* [Sweetheart, we

love each other], *Mugur, mugurel* [Small bud], *Spune măndro adevărat* [Sweetheart, tell me the truth], *Sub fereastra măndrei mele* [Under the window of my lover], *Mândrulişo de demult* [My old time sweetheart], *Jelui-m-aş şi n-am cui* [I have no one to cry to], *Hop ţurcă, furcă, De-ar fi trăznit Dumnezeu, Ciobanul* [The Shepard]; the carols (for voice and piano): *O ce veste, Leagăn verde, La nunta ce s-a întâmplat* (Vancea, 139) (my translation).

“The value of the arrangements for voice and piano resides firstly in the originality of the harmony and the artistic form of the piano accompaniment, which always depends on the poetic content of the text. (...) Dima’s virtuosity in amplifying the expressiveness of the melody through the piano accompaniment was remarked upon by his Leipzig reviewer (...). Concerning one of the lieder published in the reviewed book, he noted: “One has the impression of listening to the incomparable accompaniment of lieder by Peter Cornelius or Franz Liszt. Nothing too much, never too little, word and tone combine in complete harmony.” (Vancea, 140) (my translation).

“But what makes Dima better than most of his Romanian contemporaries is his lieder creation, especially the ones composed on lyrics by Eminescu *De ce nu-mi vii* [Why don’t you come to me], *Somnoroase păsărele* [Sleepy little birds], *Şi dacă ramuri bat în geam* [And if branches touch my windows] and *Dorinţa* [Desire] (1896). They reveal the composer’s specific trait, his gentle lyricism, the deep poetic atmosphere.” (Vancea, 142) (my translation). “Nine years later, in 1907, the series of songs composed on lyrics by Eminescu is completed by the lied *Se bate miezul nopţii* [The clock strikes midnight]. All these works represent our first achievements in the real sense of the concept of lied, being very different from the romances of the time which had an easy melody and very little piano accompaniment. We should also mention again that in Dima’s lieder, the piano participates as an equal partner to the voice in expressing the poetical idea of the text.

Equally valuable are three ballads for voice and piano, *Grozea, Ştefan Vodă şi codrul* [Ştefan Vodă and the forest] (1904) and *A venit un lup din câng* [A wolf came from the forest] (1905); through their great dramatism, they are true pearls of our vocal chamber music.” (Vancea, 143) (my translation). At the age of 60, he wrote a beautiful series of children’s songs, which next to *Scenele din viaţa copiilor* [Scenes from children’s lives] by Schumann or *Camera copiilor* [The children’s room] by Musorgski, represent compositions addressed to an adult audience. In Dima’s creation, these works are among his best lieder.” (Vancea, 144) George Dima suffered very much after he lost his elder son, at this very emotional moment, he wrote *Biata inimă-nşelată* [Poor cheated heart], in the following ten years he hardly composed anything.

However, while incarcerated by the Austro-Hungarian authorities, he will compose several religious choral songs and a final song for voice and piano, *Dorule ortacule* [Lonely nostalgia] –on a text he wrote himself.

Iacob Mureșianu (1857-1917) was born in Brașov in a family of scholars and fighters for the ideals of justice and freedom of the Romanian nation. In the magazine “The Romanian Muze”, that he founded, which was much appreciated by the general public, the composer published his, including the lieder. In *Hronicul Muzicii Românești* [The Chronicle of Romanian Musical], Octavian Lazăr Cosma noted: “Dima, Caudella, Mandicevschi, Stephănescu and Mureșianu were masters of the parameters involved in the construction of a lied, benefiting from the tradition of vocal song, which they started to exploit.

Then there is also an uninterrupted national tradition of vocal music, opera, which offers sufficient grounds for reflection on the topic of vocal treatment... Mureșianu, for example, was an excellent pianist. Thus, it is not surprising that the lieder of this period satisfy the most exacting requirements; he gives the piano an important role in deepening the image by commenting on the text, through harmony effects, changes of rhythm, generalizing instrumental parts, psychological nuances, thematic accents. The piano is treated as a virtuosic instrument, which entails technical agility, sound colours, in other words a perfect command of its resources.”(Cosma, 1976, 368) (my translation). Mureșianu wrote lieder such as *Flori de nufăr* [Water lily flowers], lyrics by Alecsandri.

“In the first stage of his creation he uses lyrics by Nenițescu *Nu plânge* [Don’t cry], *Departa clopotul răsună* [The bell chimes afar], *De când* [Since], *Dor de mare* [Missing the sea] etc. His development can be noticed, even at that time, because of the fact that two of his canon duets, written in the same style, also on lyrics by Nenițescu, received the Mendelssohn award, and six of his lieder were performed at Gewandhaus. In time, just like in his compositions for piano, an important place in his vocal creation was occupied by folk songs, to whose melody he adds an elementary harmonic accompaniment. It is the case of the famous *Eu mă duc, codrul rămâne* [I will die, the forest will live on], *Cât trăiești să nu iubești* [You should refrain from loving], but especially the melancholic songs *Ciobanul din Ardeal* [The shepherd from Ardeal], *De la poarta badii-n sus* [From my sweetheart’s gate], *Mi-a trimis bădița dor* [I long for my sweetheart], etc.” (Brezul, 1966, 372) (my translation).

Eusebie Mandicevschi (1857-1929) is a composer from Bucovina who in 1888 wrote 18 lieder for voice and piano on lyrics by V. Alecsandri. Also, he composed carols and arranged 200 folk songs for voice and piano.

Ciprian Porumbescu (1853-1883) studied in Cernăuți with Isidor Vorobchievici. His teacher was the author of the first “*Manual of musical harmony* – the first work of this kind written in Romanian – in which, for the first time in the didactic literature of this form of musical education, Romanian folk music is also taken into consideration, the author mentioning *the song, the melancholic song, the music for round dances, the ballad*, and even trying to harmonize several “*Romanian folk songs*”; in the final chapter, dedicated to the musical shape, the author analyzes the song *Pe o stâncă-naltă* [On a high cliff] – this is the name

Miculi gave in his collection to Flechtenmacher's old song *Pe o stâncă neagră* [On a dark cliff].”(Breazul, 307) (my translation). In 1877 Ciprian Porumbescu wrote *Trandafirul* [The rose], folk song for voice with piano accompaniment, a series of romances (using Romanian and German lyrics), such as: “*Du bist wie eine Blume (gewidmet dem Fraulein B.(ertha) G.(orgon)*, *C-un plâns amar venit în lume* [A bitter cry in the world], *Femeia frumuşică* [The pretty woman].”(Breazul, 313) (my translation).

Dimitrie Georgescu Kiriac (1866-1928) is attracted by composition from his first year at Schola Cantorum in Paris, when he wrote seven songs “*Doamna florilor* [Flower Lady], *Cântecul plugarului* [The ploughman's song], *La moară* [By the mill], *Micul călăreţ* [The little rider], *Mamei noastre* [To our mother], *Vine ploaia* [Rain is coming] and *Du-te iarnă* [Go away, winter].”(Vancea, 178) (my translation). He also wrote the following representative pieces for voice and piano: *Unde-aud cucul cântând* [When I hear the cuckoo sing], *Înghetată-i Dunărea* [The Danube is frozen], *Cuculeţ cu pană sură* [Little grey cuckoo bird], *Foaie verde lămâiţă* [Green thyme leaf], *Dor de ducă* [Longing for the road], *Mândra mea fărde-noroc* [My unlucky sweetheart], *Vântuleţ ce trece prin flori* [Gentle wind that blows through the flowers]. Thus, in his works, Kiriac anticipated what **Enescu** will later note: “Folk song – a true work of art – loses its features, changes its atmosphere and nostalgia if we harmonize it too much” (Revista Muzica [Music Magazine] -1928, our translation). Enescu also added that: “Kiriac stayed close to it (the folk song), making it more transparent; using a quinte, an eighth, a fourth is enough.” (Vancea, 1968, 182) (my translation).

Ioan Scărlătescu (1872-1922) is considered “the first literary Romanian composer”, thus in his creation the lieder written on lyrics by Romanian poets (*Spune-mi codrule* [Tell me, forest] and *Glas de clopote* [Chiming bells], etc., lyrics by Z. Bârsan) or by German poets – many printed in Romanian translation - occupy an important role in his creation: “The lieder he composed in the later period of his activity, whose style is influenced by that of German romanticists demonstrate that the composer possessed a colourful harmonic language. Some of these lieder have a chromatic structure similar to the Wagnerian harmony.”(Vancea, 1968, 194) (my translation).

Tiberiu Brediceanu (1877-1968) – important folk collector and Romania composer, born in Lugoj and also a student of Iacob Mureşianu, published over 2000 folk songs from all the regions of the country. Among the most famous songs he harmonized for voice and piano, it is worth mentioning: (1894, 1905) *Bagă, Doamne, luna-n nor* [God, cover the moon with clouds], (1905) *Vai, bădiţă, dragi ne-avem* [Oh, my darling, how I love you], (1906) *Cântă puiul cucului* [The baby cuckoo is singing], (1909) *S-a dus cucul de pe-aici...* [The cuckoo bird has flown away], *Pe sub flori mă legănai* [You use to cradle me underneath the flowers] (from “*La Şezătoare*”), (1911) *Turturea din valea sacă...* [Turtle dove from the dry valley], (1920) *Dragu-mi-i, mândro, de tine...* [I love you dearly, my sweetheart], (1923)

Bade, pentru ochii tăi... [Darling, for your eyes], *Voinicel cu părul creț...* [Brave little curly man], (1936) *Floriciță de pe apă* [Little flower on the water] and *Doina Stăncuței* [The Song of the Rocklet] – both on “*La Seceriș*” [At the harvest]. Also, his creation includes an impressive number of carols harmonized for voice and piano.

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